



NIGERIAN ACADEMY OF MEDICINE

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PRESS RELEASE

CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC – ALL HANDS-ON DECK TO WIN THIS WAR!

The Nigerian Academy of Medicine wishes to use this medium to identify with the good people of Nigeria in these challenging and unusual times. The current Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) outbreak which has now assumed the status of a pandemic started in Wuhan Province of China in December 2019. The disease is caused by the new 2019 coronavirus, now called Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2, or SARS-CoV-2. Although the occurrence of new cases is on the decline in China, the rest of the world is witnessing an unprecedented spread of infection in humans. There are over 571,678 cases globally with over 26,494 deaths. Africa, which initially appeared to be spared the infection, has recorded worrisome figures in the past one week. The number of diagnosed new cases grew from 147 to over 600 in one week and the total number of confirmed cases reported by 55 African countries is 4,351 (as at 28th March). In Nigeria, the number of cases rose from 3 to 12 within one week and 97 cases have been confirmed positive as at 10.40pm of 28th March 2020. Mathematical modelling suggests that the actual figure globally could be 10-20 times number of confirmed cases.

We commend the Government (at all levels), NCDC and the Presidential Task Force charged with containment of the Coronavirus pandemic in the country on steps taken so far to stem the COVID-19 epidemic in our dear country. We however note, as others have done globally, that this is a war that must be fought by all and on all fronts if we are to come through with minimal damages and scars. COVID-19 has shown itself as not only a health emergency but also an economic emergency. It has the potential to unravel any modest gains we have made in the last few years. Our key tool remains prevention. This is on account of the sheer size of our population, our resources and the challenges currently being faced by our health system. Now that we have reached the stage of community transmission, a lot needs to be done in the form of health promotion, health protection and prevention in order to reduce the quantum of patients needing hospital care. Most infected individuals will exhibit symptoms of mild to moderate infection which will increase the herd immunity of the population.

It is expedient that we fast-track our CONTAINMENT activities in order to keep our people safe and free from the virus. As part of measures to combat this pandemic, we note the constitution of committees to address the Technical Response and the Economic Impact. We advise that the committee on Technical Response must have a sub-committee or an organ that will handle strategic communication. We advise that the two committees report and update the President and Vice President on a daily basis or as frequently as possible. The Nigerian Academy of Medicine has experts in Emergency Care Medicine, Infectious Diseases, Virology and Public Health that are available and willing to offer their services to ensure Nigeria halts the spread of the Coronavirus pandemic.

Prevention

Prevention needs to be faced squarely by both the populace and government at all levels.

The populace needs to be engaged vigorously on its roles and responsibilities for social distancing, handwashing, cough etiquette and avoidance of large gatherings. All Schools, Colleges and Universities closed must remain closed till we have a clear idea of the magnitude of the problem.

All citizens must avoid non-essential travels outside or even within the country. We must track all Nigerians and foreign residents who entered the country in the last three weeks.

Our religious leaders must show a high sense of patriotism and responsibility by ensuring members of their congregation are kept safe. They must refrain from holding gatherings of more than 20 persons that can only fuel the spread of this virus.

The government must rise to its responsibility of enforcing these preventive measures, if necessary, by force. When public health measures are necessary to safeguard the lives of millions, force is justified. Countries that have been able to stem the tide of this pandemic are those that have taken bold and often drastic measures. We have started but must not rest on our oars.

Donations have started coming in, but we need more of the wealthy Nigerians to identify where they can help. Indeed, Nigerians are brilliant, talented individuals. This is the time for all Nigerians to ask how they can contribute to stem this tide that is threatening to engulf us. The contribution is not only of money, but also of materials and most importantly, a patriotic decision to comply with all measures designed to end the pandemic. At all levels, Nigerians must demonstrate a high level of leadership by playing their roles and ensure we prevent escalation of the outbreak.

The Government must ensure that information is provided regularly by highly placed individuals in Government. This will reassure Nigerians and prevent the spreading of fake or unverified information. The role of the government (at all levels) in stemming this pandemic must not be left in doubt.

Take home points

- **Education and prevention remain the major interventions against COVID-19 and similar diseases.**
- **Social Distancing is key to breaking the transmission**
- **Self-isolation by individuals with suspicion of COVID-19 infection and their contacts, and of ALL individuals arriving in Nigeria from other countries is helpful to the family and the community**
- **Kindly note that panic is often counter-productive and is unnecessary. This includes the circulation of 'FAKE NEWS'.**

Service delivery

Now is the time for vigorous preparation. We sincerely pray that we will not witness a full-blown outbreak. However, as leaders in the scientific arena, we must insist that we prepare for the worst case-scenario. We need to study and document prevalence of and contagiousness of individuals with typical symptoms and others (mild symptoms/carriers) to understand the overall prevalence and the pandemic potential of the disease in our country.

Every State Government must ensure that well stocked and equipped isolation units are prepared. These include the provision of large quantities of personal protective equipment, N95 masks, ventilators etc. Now is the time to make provisions and procure these items. Globally, all countries are currently competing fiercely to obtain these items. Indeed, these items are currently running low. Some manufacturers in Nigeria have the capacity to provide some of these items. This is the time to support them to make some of these items available. This approach has been found useful globally to overcome these shortages. Now is the time to train the staff that will provide care at these centers, and they must be well trained. We must insist that this is the time for health care providers at all levels to be trained on what to do depending on their skills level. Health-workers, as the most important resource, need to be protected not only through adequate training but also by the provision of personal protection equipment (PPE). The recall of agile retired staff with the relevant expertise, will be an important and a proactive step in our preparedness efforts/activities.

Testing! Testing !! Testing!!! To win this war, we must follow the virus and overtake it. Testing has been identified as a prerequisite for winning this war. Lack of testing is like going into a war blindfolded. These were the words of Dr. Tedros Ghebreyesus, the WHO-Director General. The Government must ensure easy and ready access to testing by people with symptoms and their contacts. This can only be done by supporting laboratories and researchers with requisite skills to do this. Should anyone observe symptoms of the COVID-19 such as dry cough, fever and difficulty with breathing, kindly call the hotlines for the different States as widely advertised. We must all fight and win the WAR AGAINST COVID-19.

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Secretary to the Nigerian Academy of Medicine

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